



EDUCATION & SEMINARS

Review of the 2010 Five Element Acupuncture Symposium

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There was something wonderfully warm about this year's "Five Element Acupuncture Symposium: Continuing the Journey," and it wasn't just the perfect California weather. I think what moved me was the sense of camaraderie that the group created almost immediately upon entering the room.

Unlike many other seminars, everyone participated in the sessions together at the event, which took place in Santa Monica, Calif., Oct. 8-10, 2010. As a result, the journey of growth and intellectual development occurred for each of us individually, but more importantly, as a group. At no other symposium have I felt so strongly that I was learning and growing in community, and not solely as an individual practitioner.

Learning sessions at the symposium were exceptional. After a brief orientation from the event directors, Marilyn Allen, from the American Acupuncture Council [and *Acupuncture Today*], gave a great presentation on ethics and legal issues in acupuncture. Her insights into how to stay out of trouble were extremely useful. I especially appreciated her discourse on the dangers of heat lamps falling on patients. I also appreciated her discussion of efforts to create a common, inclusive language for acupuncture globally.

Clues From Voices

Marilyn was followed by a double session on the sounds of the elements by Niki Bilton, academic dean of Onigiara College of Acupuncture and Moxabustion in Ontario, Canada. Her presentation of audio examples to hone diagnosis skills to discern a patient's causative factor (CF) from the sound of the voice was absolutely invaluable. I found her inclusion of dozens of examples for comparison extremely helpful.

Listening to the voices, we were taught to discern such as differences as the vocal drop-off one hears in the Metal CF, as compared to the possible dramatic, "ready, ready, waiting, go" quality of

the Water CF.

Finally, Stephen "Tuna" Flores and Pat Gorman, of Five Element Healthcare in New York, presented "Heavenly Acupuncture," discussing how to access and use the Five Aspects of Spirit (*Zhi, Hun, Shen, Yi, and P'o*). It was truly inspiring to see Pat via Skype broadcasting from her hospital room in New York, even after recent surgery. As she spoke, it was as if the aspects of spirit radiated from her to illuminate the subject.

Day two of the conference did not disappoint. Early risers participated in "Roots and Branches Five Element Qi Gong," led by Flores, Gorman, and Margaret Olmsted, in which we learned and practiced *qigong* techniques useful for patients to enhance the benefits of any acupuncture treatment.

Khosrow Khalighi, the founder and director of Five Element Trainings in San Francisco, opened the full morning session. Khosrow asked each of us to focus on what might be one of the most important skills a practitioner can have: developing and refining self-assessment tools for engaging with patients. In the practitioner development model he presented, the practitioner must cultivate compassion, sympathy and an ability to guide. We must also have a willingness to anchor (when times are turbulent), and breadth of vision to see the patient in a state of health. He guided us through how to move beyond the intellectual theory and how to carry the embodiment of these ideas to our patients.

David Ford, founder and director of Wilderness Acupuncture, began his presentation on "The Magnificent Wholism of the Points" by reminding us that we can never be masters of our sacred art, only students, and to fully practice this medicine, we must all be flexible in our views to allow for true healing to occur.

"This medicine is an evolving tradition," he said. "Practicing it is a state of evolutionary development ... that requires us to learn from one another, no matter what our tradition or station in life. The spirits of the points are there to wake up the active imagination inside of us."

By lunch, my mind was swimming with ideas for practice and treatment, and fortunately, we could order lunch and lounge poolside in magnificent weather. After lunch, Chuck Graham, the academic dean of the Academy for Five Element Acupuncture in Gainesville, Fla., initiated a dynamic discussion on treatment of the causative factor, the use of elements within, and treatment of various points. His presentation sparked a lively discourse, allowing everyone in the room to explore this topic. We rounded out the day with Dirk Hein, founder and director of the Wu Hsing Tao School in Seattle. His interactive presentation on the theater of acupuncture, using facial expression to relate to and move patients, was a light and enjoyable way to end the afternoon's work.

Powerful Presentations

Day three featured some of the most powerful presentations of the entire symposium. After our morning session of "Roots and Branches Five Element Qi Gong," Neil Gumenick, founder and director of The Institute of Classical Five-Element Acupuncture in Santa Monica, took an extensive look at the spirits of the points, focusing on how to use "often overlooked" points. For example, GV (Du) 1, "Long Strength," can be a powerful point to provide a patient with strength and endurance for the "long haul," a kick-start, or rallying surge of energy when the patient is weak at any level. "Strength Divider," GV (Du) 18, can be useful for the patient who cannot prioritize and balance the finite amount of strength they have, who over- or underestimates their capacity. This would be someone whose body, mind, and spirit are out of harmony with one another.

Nurse and acupuncturist Linda Simons, who is a faculty member of TAI Sophia Institute in Laurel, Md., gave an inspiring and heartfelt presentation, sharing of her own extensive experience and leading us through group exercises on how to achieve rapport with patients who are of different cultural backgrounds than ourselves, or who have suffered major trauma.

George Rodriguez, MD, provided a vibrant look at some of the symptoms and signs a patient might present with that should be referred out to a physician for consultation. He also discussed opportunities for integrative medical relationships between the acupuncture and allopathic medical professions.

Last, but certainly not least, Eliot Ivanhoe, MD, concluded the symposium with an insightful discussion on the signs a practitioner might use to discern whether or not treatment has been effective. He paid special attention to the art of healing and what it means to heal.

"We deal with nonmateriality," he said. "Humans are not just bags of chemicals; we are predominantly nonmaterial, which has supremacy over physicality. We tend to think of the physical as the limiting factor, and it almost always is not."

Dr. Ivanhoe's session left the room on its feet with appreciation not only of his presentation, but for the entire symposium weekend.

A Great Place to Learn and Build Community

The Five Element Acupuncture Symposium: Continuing the Journey is a relaxed event, presented in a beautiful setting at the Viceroy Santa Monica. On the California coast, it's hard to be uptight about - well, anything. So, in true West Coast form, the event organizers are welcoming and provide a host of experienced presenters with a variety of perspectives on acupuncture treatment. Their goal, to build community and enrich practice, is easily facilitated in the setting they created. I enjoyed interacting not only with Five Element acupuncturists, but all the varied practitioners who are involved in integrated medical practices.

In short, The Five Element Acupuncture Symposium is a space for learning and community building and I will definitely attend again next year and hope to see you there.

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